

THE COHORT LEARNING HANDBOOK

A complete guide for facilitators and organisers



EdTech^{Hub}

About EdTech Hub

[EdTech Hub](#) is a global research partnership. Our goal is to empower people by giving them the evidence they need to make decisions about technology in education. Our [evidence library](#) is a repository of our latest research, findings, and wider literature on EdTech. As a global partnership, we seek to make our evidence available and accessible to those who are looking for EdTech solutions worldwide.

As part of that mission, we have run a Course for EdTech entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa, to build an understanding and approach to harnessing evidence as they develop and scale their products. Between 2022-24, the Course supported 94 entrepreneurs in 5 cohorts. EdTech Hub is supported by UKAid, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, World Bank, and UNICEF. This work was delivered in collaboration with the Jacobs Foundation and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The views in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations.

To find out more about us, go to edtechhub.org/. Our evidence library can be found at docs.edtechhub.org/lib/.

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Contact

If you have any questions, please contact hello@edtechhub.org.

**Who is this
handbook
for?**

This handbook captures EdTech Hub's approach to building cohorts on its Evidence-Led Entrepreneurship Course.

The handbook is for individuals and organisations who support EdTech entrepreneurs (e.g., accelerators, entrepreneurship programmes, funders) to scale products and services impactfully.

By sharing EdTech Hub's approach and process for cohort building, we hope to nurture a more evidence-led EdTech entrepreneurship ecosystem. Together, we can create EdTech products that scale sustainably, and help children to read, write, and count.

Before you start

Hello,

This handbook is part of a support pack offered by EdTech Hub to organisations looking to support entrepreneurs, non-governmental organisations, or other participants in their accelerators or incubators in utilising evidence in their products or services.

This document aims to give you the insights, tools, and resources to run an effective cohort learning journey for individuals undertaking **EdTech Hub's Evidence-Led Entrepreneurship Course**. If you have any questions, please contact hello@edtechhub.org.



These elements form the wider support pack:

01

The course content for participants who are completing the **Evidence-Led Entrepreneurship Course**.

02

The evidence coaching handbook that guides you through how to coach EdTech entrepreneurs in evidence uptake.



How to use this handbook

Step 1

Familiarise yourself with the cohort concept and the key principles. Consider which of the key principles are showing up in your work already, and which aren't. We recommend discussing this with a colleague or peer.



Step 2

This handbook is structured with a step-by-step process, taking you from onboarding your cohort to transitioning them to alumni. We recommend looking through the whole handbook, and then using the key elements to guide you through planning for your cohort launch.

Step 3

Dig into the detail by following the links to our valuable supporting documents. These will hopefully lay the groundwork for you and / or your team to launch and run a successful learning cohort.



Introduction

Why have we created this cohort handbook?

We know that people learn better when they learn together.

EdTech Hub's Evidence-Led Entrepreneurship Course aims to help entrepreneurs adopt and utilise evidence, to learn, and to scale their products and services. Building a cohort supports entrepreneurs to learn quickly and more confidently as a result of learning with, from, and alongside peers sharing the same experience. By ensuring that the learning journey is the most effective it can be, we ensure our work has the greatest impact.

What do we aim to do by facilitating a cohort journey?

- Leverage the unique power of a cohort to improve the learning experience and learning outcomes.
- Diversify the support on offer. Instead of entrepreneurs receiving support and information from the content, the course team, and / or a coach, they have a wide range of peers and combinations of others to learn from and work with.
- Streamline and improve technical support that we often offer ventures. For example, it is far more resource efficient to teach skills to a cohort together rather than separately as individuals.

Key principles of cohort facilitation

We've developed five key principles for running cohorts. Together, they make the acronym **CARES**. They are not sequential, but are principles to consider throughout the journey.

C Cohort From the moment someone applies or emails you, they are gaining a sense of what kind of experience will be offered. So, treat every part of the user journey as a cohort experience.

A Agency Do not do for the cohort what it can do for itself. Encourage participants to ask for help from and support each other, and contact you as a secondary avenue.

R Relationships Focus on relationship- and trust-building first and foremost. This is key to allowing participants to learn from each other. Vulnerability is necessary to share lessons learnt.

E Expectations Set clear expectations for the group. Give participants everything they need to engage in the journey. Build some clear group principles together at the start.

S Start Invest in the start of the journey. Cohort building is intensive before the cohort launches and when it gets underway, and becomes less intensive over time. It's easier to set something up well than it is to remedy it later on. Time investment early pays off when it comes to cohorts.

“Through this course, I got to understand the industry language, expectations and how to build a product that speaks to the needs of users — and not just the aspirations of the founder. I enjoyed the course because I connected with peers, industry experts and people who shared in the vision of Esoma Kids to shape Africa’s future through digitized education. The simplicity in presentation of complex research lexicon made the program even more enjoyable”.

– Julius Irungu, Founder of Esoma Solutions Ltd



Onboarding

Set the expectations of being part of a cohort before the experience begins.

This is important because people's early engagement with an experience often ends up defining it.

You'll have heard people speak about the importance of first impressions. Well, the same goes for cohorts. The cohort experience starts before people engage with the learning journey. If you begin by treating everyone as **individuals**, it will be hard later to bring them together as a **cohort**. If you start treating them as part of a **cohort**, it's more likely to **stay that way**.



Once a cohort, always a cohort

How can you do this?

We have all the information to guide you through a smooth onboarding process on slides 10, 11 and 12.



Recruiting people for the course

SETTING UP AN APPLICATION FORM

An application form can help you to provide a purposeful start to the learning journey. A form can help you to:

- Ensure entrepreneurs can commit enough time to the course
- Confirm their willingness to engage with the cohort
- Gather useful information for designing the cohort journey



[Use this example to inspire the questions for your form](#)

ADVERTISING THE COURSE

When advertising the course, clearly explain the benefits entrepreneurs will gain from the cohort to solidify their commitment before the course starts by:

- Articulating exactly what entrepreneurs can gain from their cohort by taking part in this course
- Showing how this course is unique in its offer of peer-to-peer support



[Here are some examples of outreach messaging](#)

Accepting people onto the course and staying in touch

NOTIFYING PEOPLE ABOUT COURSE ACCEPTANCE

Show that your collective intention doesn't end when people don't make it onto your cohort.

- Stay connected to people who are unsuccessful in their application, for example by inviting them to be part of a network or a mailing list, and sharing key resources



Here are some email templates to notify entrepreneurs

STARTING WITH OPEN COMMUNICATION

Once accepted, encourage entrepreneurs to book a 1-to-1 with the course team. This enables you to:

- Confirm the entrepreneur's interest
- Identify the learning gaps of the entrepreneur
- Develop a focused plan on where to spend energy together with the entrepreneur
- Select the most relevant content that will support the entrepreneur's learning goals



Some examples for the structure of a 1-to-1

Launching the course

BUILDING A COLLECTIVE MINDSET FROM THE START

Encourage the group to see their peers as sources of collaboration, mentorship, or good advice, through activities such as:

- Co-designing a set of cohort principles or values
- Setting up a conversation space where they can converse, e.g., a WhatsApp group
- Encouraging the cohort to help itself and each participant



[Here are some examples of cohort principles](#)

FOCUSSING ON TRUST AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

People are more likely to collaborate if they trust each other, so create opportunities for people to connect by:

- Matching entrepreneurs with buddies, so they have a peer to go through the course with
- Supporting entrepreneurs to share their experiences, including positive ones (by presenting to the group) and opportunities to learn (through WhatsApp prompts)



[Here is an email template to link course buddies](#)

The cohort in progress

The journey is underway, so it's important to keep the cohort connected.

As the initial excitement of this novel experience wears off, it's important to give people handrails to stay engaged. The more regular and consistent these opportunities can be, the better. Engagement is a necessary condition for a good cohort experience, and so as the cohort settles in, keeping the entrepreneurs connected is key.



Stay connected, thrive together

How can you do this?

We have all the information to guide you through the mid-way point of the cohort journey on slides 14 and 15.



Maintaining a collective mindset and a rhythm of peer support

GIVING ENTREPRENEURS WHAT THEY NEED

To enable entrepreneurs to prioritise the course in their lives, ensure they have all the information they need about what is expected of them by:

- Setting up all sessions in advance and inviting entrepreneurs through an online calendar
- Developing a course calendar to highlight key moments and position entrepreneurs in the course schedule



[Here is an example of a course calendar](#)

PRIORITISING PEER SUPPORT

Life will get busy for entrepreneurs, so it's key to keep them connected with the cohort. You can do this by:

- Encouraging entrepreneurs to meet with the buddies
- Asking open questions on the WhatsApp group e.g., sharing a 'conversation prompt' every week
- Setting up 'Ask Me Anything' sessions with your own alumni



[Here is a session outline for an 'Ask Me Anything' session](#)

Keeping in touch with the cohort

KEEPING CONNECTED TO THE ENTREPRENEURS

Although you want to encourage the cohort to help itself, it's also important that entrepreneurs feel they can approach you. You can encourage this by:

- Tracking engagement across 1-to-1s, sessions, and WhatsApp usage and keeping an eye on differences
- Adding in an optional mid-point 1-to-1
- Sending out regular messages with reminders, prompts and check-ins via email or WhatsApp



[Here is an example of a bi-weekly email](#)

ENSURING FEEDBACK LOOPS ARE BUILT IN

Seeking out feedback enables you to make adjustments as you go. Do this by:

- Creating an open feedback form which entrepreneurs can use at any time, for anything
- Making time as a team to reflect and iterate, sharing statistics and stories on what is and isn't working and making decisions on what to change, lose, and add



[Here is an example feedback form](#)

Graduation and alumni

As the cohort experience is coming to an end, close with intention.

As we have seen throughout this handbook, the start of the cohort journey is so important because that's where you foster a collective mindset. The course is now coming to an end, and it's vital to steward the cohort through the next steps. The extent to which you can support alumni will depend on what resources you have available. Remember, the five key principles mentioned on [slide 7](#) can still apply to this stage.



Start strong, close together

How can you do this?

We have all the information to guide you through graduation and transition to alumni on slide 17.



Staying in touch with and for alumni

STAYING IN TOUCH AS A COLLECTIVE COHORT

You have worked hard to facilitate cohort connection, so it's vital that you now give entrepreneurs the opportunity to stay in touch with one another. Do this by:

- Hosting a closing ceremony or graduation to close this particular cohort experience
- Co-designing a new set of principles for the next phase
- Asking engaged entrepreneurs to be 'cohort champions' to continue the conversation and connection



[Here is an example of a cohort closing ceremony](#)

STAYING IN TOUCH WITH THE COHORT

You likely have close relationships with the cohort. Make it clear if and how you'll stay in touch. Do this by:

- Creating opportunities to stay in touch, e.g., with an 'alumni drop-in' session, a newsletter, and / or a follow-up survey
- Giving entrepreneurs an example of a way to share their successes so you can amplify and share these



[Here is an example of a final cohort email](#)

Resources list

A full list of all the resources mentioned throughout this handbook.

1. [Application form: Example](#)
2. [Outreach messaging: Examples to advertise the course](#)
3. [Email templates for course notifications: Examples](#)
4. [Suggested structure for 1-to-1s with course participants](#)
5. [Cohort principles: Example](#)
6. [Buddy matching email template: Example](#)
7. [Course calendar: Example](#)
8. ['Ask Me Anything' session plan](#)
9. [Bi-weekly email template: Example](#)
10. [Feedback form: Example](#)
11. [Cohort closing ceremony session plan](#)
12. [Cohort closing email template: Example](#)



EdTechHub

Clear evidence, better decisions, more learning.

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